

# Federal Emergency Management Agency

Washington, D.C. 20472

EL-19

MEMORANDUM FOR: Regional Directors  
Regions I-X

ATTENTION: Mitigation Division Directors

FROM: Michael J. Armstrong  
Associate Director Mitigation

DATE: 18-AUG-98

SUBJECT: Use of Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) for  
Measures to address Tornado Safety

The high incidence of tornadic activity associated with the 1997/1998 El Nino weather pattern has led to unusual loss of life and property damage. These recent disasters have made apparent the need for additional funding for warning systems that cannot be accommodated by existing programs.

While the Federal government cannot indefinitely support warning system acquisition, I want to be responsive to these unusual needs and I will allow States that have received a Presidential disaster declaration for tornadoes to use up to 10% of the total available HMGP funding, at their discretion, for hazard mitigation measures to address the unique hazards posed by tornadoes. This policy essentially increases the 5 % set-aside initiative funding by an additional 5% to allow for tornado-related projects.

To qualify, States must develop a comprehensive plan to address warning of citizens (ensuring 90 % coverage), furthering the "safe room" concept in construction or rehabilitation of residences or commercial structures, and address the issue of sheltering in mobile home parks. The plan must also have a component addressing how the State will implement an ongoing public education program so that citizens are aware of warning systems and their meaning (including the availability of in-home shelter designs).

FEMA also encourages the use of the NOAA weather radio system as a reliable and cost-effective means of providing timely warning to the public. Additionally, NOAA has agreed to maintain transmission points. Maintenance of warning systems will not be an eligible expense.

As with standard HMGP projects, a project type to be funded from the 10% portion of the HMGP must be identified in the State's hazard mitigation plan and fulfill the goal of the program, that is, to reduce or prevent future damage to property and to reduce or prevent loss of life or injury from tornadoes. However, tornado mitigation projects or measures,

such as warning systems, eligible within this 10% portion of the HMGP are often difficult to evaluate against traditional quantitative program cost effectiveness and eligibility criteria. Consequently, in lieu of a benefit-cost analysis, the State should include a narrative that identifies the mitigation benefits and indicates that there is a reasonable expectation that future damage or loss of life or injury will be reduced or prevented. Finally, these projects will have to be reviewed for compliance under the National Environmental Policy Act and other federal environmentally-related laws.

In the interest of expediting the closeout of older disasters, this policy applies to all open disasters of any kind declared prior to Fiscal Year 1998. It also applies to all Fiscal Year 1998 and future declarations in which tornadoes or high winds played a role. This policy will terminate upon FEMA's adoption of HMGP regulatory changes published as a proposed rule in the Federal Register on May 1, 1998, which states that warning systems may only be funded from the 5 % Initiative. We anticipate that this rule will be finalized by the end of the calendar year. New disaster declarations after the effective date of the Final Rule will operate under the original 5 % Initiative guidelines.

Attached for your convenience is a sample letter conveying this policy to the State Directors.

If you have any questions, please call Robert F. Shea at (202) 646-3619 or Donna M. Dannels at (202) 646-3662.

Attachment

## Sample Tornado Policy Letter to the States

Name  
Director  
State Emergency Management Agency  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear State Emergency Management Director:

The recent high incidence of El Nino related tornado and high wind activity has led to an unusual loss of life and property damage in certain areas of the United States in 1998. These recent disasters have made apparent the need for improvements in the mechanisms used for protecting our citizens.

While the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) cannot indefinitely support warning system acquisition, the Agency wishes to be responsive to the unusual needs brought about by the recent tornado disasters. Therefore, FEMA will expand the 5 % Initiative in certain States that adopt comprehensive tornado warning and public education strategies to allow for funding of additional tornado-related measures.

This policy essentially increases the 5 % Initiative funding by an additional 5 % in certain disaster declarations to allow for tornado-related projects. In the interest of expediting the closeout of older disasters, this policy applies to all open disasters of any kind declared before Fiscal Year 1998. It also applies to all Fiscal Year 1998 and future declarations in which tornadoes or high winds played a role. This policy is effective immediately and will terminate upon publication of a Final Rule in the *Federal Register* that revises the categories of eligible HMGP projects. FEMA expects to publish the rule by the end of the calendar year. New disaster declarations after the effective date of the Final Rule will operate under the original 5 % Initiative guidelines.

To receive approval of tornado-related projects under this policy, States must develop a comprehensive tornado warning and public education plan. The plan must address warning at least 90% of the citizens, further the "safe room" concept in the construction or rehabilitation of residences or commercial structures, and address the issue of sheltering in mobile home parks. The plan must also have a component addressing how the State will implement an ongoing public education program so that citizens are aware of warning systems and their meaning (including the availability of in-home shelter designs) so they may respond accordingly during a warning event. States should submit selected tornado-related project applications, indicating the State's priority order for funding, to the FEMA Regional Director in accordance with the timeframes set forth in the HMGP implementing regulations.

As with any standard HMGP project, projects to be funded from the 10% portion of the HMGP ceiling must be identified in the State's hazard mitigation plan. Projects must also fulfill the goal of reducing or preventing future damage to property, injuries, and loss of

life from tornadoes. Maintenance of warning systems will not be an eligible project under the HMGP. FEMA recognizes that tornado mitigation projects, such as warning systems and public education, are often difficult to evaluate against traditional quantitative program cost-effectiveness and eligibility criteria. Therefore, in lieu of a benefit-cost analysis, the State should include a narrative that identifies the mitigation benefits and indicates that a reasonable reduction in property damages, injuries, and loss of life will occur as a result of implementing the project. Finally, these projects must be evaluated for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and other Federally-related laws.

FEMA strongly encourages the use of weather radio systems from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) as a reliable and cost-effective means of providing timely warning to the public. NOAA continues to be responsible for maintenance of transmission points of such systems.

We look forward to working with you to implement this policy. If you have any questions regarding the policy, please contact \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely,

Name  
Regional Director  
FEMA Region \_\_\_\_